

# BRANCH REPORT

## MB91 | Eastern Manitoba

### President's message

**Chuck Vandergraaf**

*"The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry"* (a line from the poem *To a Mouse* by Robert Burns, translated from Scottish into English).

The plan was to get a branch newsletter out in time for Christmas, leaving sufficient time for composing, editing, having it emailed to our members and mailed to our members for whom we do not have an email address. And then the Canada Post strike hit. However, all clouds have a silver lining, and this silver lining consists of a roll of 100 "forever stamps" that I picked up before Canada Post raised its domestic postal rates. Who knew?

Now that we have entered 2025, it is high time to compose the newsletter that was intended for the end of 2024. And there is a lot of good news to report.

### Branch board

After years of hinting, cajoling, and perhaps threatening that our branch would not survive, one of our newer members, Alanna Wilcox expressed interest in becoming involved to a limited extent in the activities of the branch. She took the role of health benefits officer (HBO) and that led to an increased interest in the affairs of the branch. She attended the 2024 Prairies/NWT District meeting in Saskatoon and that led to an even higher level of interest on her part that resulted in her attending the Annual Meeting of Members (AMM) in Gatineau in June. She became the vice-president of our branch at the fall general meeting (FGM) in October

and is now slated to take over the president position at the close of the 2025 branch annual meeting (BAM), more commonly known as the annual general meeting (AGM) on April 8, 2025.

The good news does not stop there. At the 2024 FGM, Alice Young also expressed an interest in becoming involved in the branch and your board appointed her as a member-at-large. More recently, Alice has indicated that she would be interested in taking on the membership role, currently held by Evelyn Vandergraaf. Evelyn is quite willing to relinquish that role. Because this position needs to be approved by the members, you will be asked to approve Alice in that position at the upcoming BAM.

"But wait, there's more!" as some commercials would say. A few weeks ago, Karen Ross also expressed an interest in serving on the board, as a member-at-large. The board has appointed her to that position. With "the next generation" now becoming involved, there is hope that our branch will continue.

As of this writing, we are still looking for a vice-president. The first term of the vice-president's position consists mainly of becoming familiar with the operation of the branch. There is training available, including attending regional (provincial), district (Prairies/NWT), and the national Annual Meeting of Members (AMM). Please consider serving in this position because the branch can only operate with volunteer support.



## Advocacy

One of the tasks that the Association has taken upon itself is advocacy, the conveying of the interests of its members and other seniors to elected officials at the provincial and federal levels. The Association has appointed advocacy program officers (APOs) to connect with elected members of the provincial legislatures (MLAs) and federal members of Parliament (MPs). Those of you who attended the FGM in 2024 October heard from our provincial APO, Glenn Armstrong. On Jan. 10, Glenn, Alanna Wilcox and I met with the MP from the Selkirk-Interlake-Eastman constituency, James Bezan. He was gracious to listen to our concerns for about an hour. While Bezan indicated a willingness to attend a town hall, he did indicate that most of the people that attended these meetings have already made up their minds. Often, candidates' time can be spent more fruitfully campaigning in other ways. However, in politics, there is no use in looking beyond the next fortnight. (attributed to UK politician Joseph Chamberlain (July 8, 1836 – July 2, 1914)).

Our branch should be ready to arrange a Town Hall at short notice, if necessary. We had budgeted for this in our allocated funds that was approved at our last BAM and FGM. If no town hall meeting is held, we can use the money for the next provincial election.

I was also able to arrange a meeting with the MP for Provencher, Ted Falk. About 40 of our members live in his constituency and about 450 are members of the Winnipeg & District Branch. Glenn Armstrong, Lionel Guerard, President of the Winnipeg & District Branch and I met with Falk on Feb. 6 in his constituency office in Steinbach. Although he was able to spend only 30 minutes with us, the meeting was very cordial. Mr. Falk was very engaged. Of particular interest in the conversation was veterans' services and the challenges faced by retiring members of the Canadian Armed Forces and of the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police. We also briefly touched on the value that volunteer organizations bring through various charitable organizations and a wish to increase the tax deductions for charitable donations. Ted Falk mentioned that he had proposed a private members bill in the past but also acknowledged some of the criticisms of this bill. At the end of the meeting Craig Tomlinson, his chief of staff, asked if we agreed to have a group photo taken. We did not object (obviously). I asked if we could have a copy of the picture for our own use. Falk agreed, and Craig shared the photo with Glenn.

Personal contact with our elected officials is very important to make them aware of the concerns of the Association. As we enter an election period, it is important to pursue any opportunity we get to do so.

## Branch and satellite branch meetings

For reasons that pertain to rules imposed on us by the Canada Revenue Agency, we can only spend a limited amount of money on individual members and have thus been advised to designate all meetings as recruitment meetings. This means that we can continue to provide lunches at no charge to members and guests. The flipside is that we should use these meetings to bring in new members and you are asked to do your part by talking to your friends who are eligible for membership in our Association. Some of the perks are eligibility in MEDOC, the "gold plated" travel insurance plan, as well as other offers from our Preferred Partners, but the main goal is to strengthen the Association so that it can interact with elected officials from a position of strength.

Our 2025 BAM has been scheduled for Tuesday, April 8, 2025, at the usual venue, the Pinawa Alliance Church, starting at noon. It will follow the standard routine, with a soup-and-sandwich buffet lunch, coffee and dessert. This will be followed by a

presentation by an invited speaker from Arbor Memorial on *87 Decisions: A list of things that need to be done immediately after someone dies* and conclude with our business meeting.

As some may recall, we were able to put some of our surplus funds, amassed during the COVID-19 era, into allocated funds for non-routine expenses. These include satellite meetings outside Pinawa. We held a satellite meeting in Lac du Bonnet a few years ago and we could do the same in Beausejour and/or Lac du Bonnet. There are suitable venues available in both communities, but we need volunteers to organize these events.

### Postscript

This is my final newsletter. As I indicated above, I will be stepping down as president at the end of the upcoming BAM, after serving in that position since 2011, with a two-year gap when Peter Baumgartner held the reins. It has been a pleasant and rewarding experience but now it is time to ride off into the proverbial sunset. Thank you for allowing me to serve you, and our Association these many years, and big thanks to our board members who gave their time to volunteer. I am not naming them in case I miss one or more, but your support in operating this branch has been appreciated. With Alanna at the helm, and with new board members, our branch will be in good hands.

## Membership report

**Evelyn Vandergraaf**

As of Feb. 21, 2025, our membership stood as follow (with numbers of Aug. 13, 2024, in brackets):

Double households	207	(210)
Single households	152	(153)
Regular households	359	(363)
Active members	566	(573)
Non-DDS* households	32	(33)
DDS households	327	(330)

\*DDS: Deducted Deducted at Source

From the Association's perspective, it is preferred that members pay their membership by DDS. The monthly deduction is then taken off your pension cheque. Any existing member who makes the switch to DDS, or new member paying by DDS, will receive a one-time special offer of three free months of membership (\$4.77 per month for a single membership, or \$6.20 per month for a double). That's a savings of 25 per cent! There is more information on this at the Association's website:

[federalretirees.ca/en/members/save-when-you-pay-by-dds](https://federalretirees.ca/en/members/save-when-you-pay-by-dds). Or, you can reach the membership department by phone at 1-855-304-4700 ext. 300.

We saw an overall decrease of seven members over the last six months, compared to a loss of 21 members over the previous five-month period. Some of the decrease is due to members moving out of our catchment area. If you are moving away and want to keep your membership in our branch, please notify us at [easternmanitoba@federalretirees.ca](mailto:easternmanitoba@federalretirees.ca) and we will convey that information to the Association's national office. Once you have moved, we are unable to follow up with you as we no longer have access to your contact information.

We have lost the following members since the fall 2023 newsletter:

Sidney Carter  
Jacqueline Hampshire  
Kay Harvey  
Ed Huisman  
Vince Lopata  
Joan Mills  
Harold Ott  
Roger Portman  
Jim Rogocki  
Bernice Stefaniuk  
Agnes Swanson  
Lorne Swanson  
Ken Wasywich

## From our HBO

Alanna Wilcox

### What to know regarding your PSHCP and PDCP in the event of a death

When a public service retiree dies, their PSHCP and/or PDCP benefits for the retiree, and if applicable, their spouse and dependants, end immediately upon their death. The survivor must set up their own PSHCP and/or PDCP account through the

Government of Canada Pension Centre (1-800-561-7930) and the positive enrollment through Canada Life. Delays in completing any part of the reporting of the death, forms completion, or positive enrollment may result in a significant break in entitlement to benefits.

### Updating emails in the Federal Retirees database

With the introduction of Valley Fiber to communities, many of our members are changing their email addresses. Don't forget to let us know of updated email addresses at [easternmanitoba@federalretirees.ca](mailto:easternmanitoba@federalretirees.ca).

### Public service surplus pension funds

Our Association is concerned about the federal government's handling of non-permitted surplus funds, which has resulted in the transfer of \$1.9 billion into government accounts. It is the Association's position that surplus funds should be reinvested in initiatives that benefit those who helped generate them, particularly retirees. As an association, we are united in advocating for the rights and interests of retirees, especially when it comes to their retirement security.